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ABSTRACT

Gonzaga University in Spokane, Washington, developed a preservice teacher education program that holistically assesses the skills of teacher candidates to better identify prospective teachers from underrepresented racial, ethnic, and disability-related groups. Careful attention is paid to the admissions process, and program applicants are assessed with regard to key program themes: reflective thinking, the idea that teaching is interpersonal and professional, the value of developing conflict resolution skills, and the value of multiple perspectives and ways of doing. Students who have self-disclosed their disabilities work with the disabilities services center, and faculty are notified of any students needing accommodations to be successful. Prior to student teaching, candidates must possess a minimum grade point average, acceptable standardized test scores, and three recommendations, and must attend a meeting explaining student teaching and the application process. Teacher education faculty review the skills and abilities of each student teacher candidate. Each student teacher is assigned a university supervisor who observes the student teacher and acts as a liaison between the school and university. A remediation plan is developed for student teachers who have difficulty, and the experience is terminated if competencies in the plan cannot be met. A second chance is given at another site the following semester. The experiences of four student teachers with disabilities are described to show how adaptations, accommodations, or simply a creative look at alternative approaches can create an environment for success. (TD)

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"ASSISTING PRESERVICE TEACHERS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS: FOUR TRUE STORIES"

ED 429 770

As we stand on the threshold of a new age in teacher education and approach an era in which the demand for teachers is increasing, we must be concerned about not only the number of teachers we are producing, but also the quality of those teachers. We must find ways to more holistically assess the skills of our teacher candidates and to go beyond the "paper screening" that we have relied on in the past so that we can better identify prospective teachers from all cultural/racial/ethnic and/or underrepresented groups, even those who might not have been totally successful as undergraduates in the traditional academic sense due to cultural, linguistic, and or disability-related differences. We must recognize that interpersonal skills are playing an increasingly important role in today's diverse classrooms. We must find a way to attract and retain a wider scope of prospective teachers for tomorrow's children in both general and special education.

At Gonzaga University, we began with a model first developed at the University of Redlands and then revamped it to meet our particular needs. We wanted to find a way to screen out program applicants who showed little potential for success in our program and to get to know the skills and needs of our prospective students. We also wanted to introduce the key themes of our program so students would know up front what our program emphasizes and what we value as professionals. In particular, we wanted to introduce the concept of reflective thinking, the idea that teaching is an interpersonal and professional act, the idea of the value of developing conflict resolution skills, and the philosophy we share in our belief in the value of multiple perspectives and ways of doing. We also wanted to introduce students to the importance of the development of their professional skills, including humor, self-knowledge, resiliency factors, collaboration, respect for the field of education, how to think on their feet, and how to collaborate. We based our model on the literature on reflective thinking (Posner was our true base), on the literature about adult learners, on the teacher induction literature, and on surveys done by the Washington State Professional Education Advisory Board about the skills needed by beginning teachers.

We decided to structure the Lab as a Saturday morning, four-hour session with a variety of activities. We would begin with a welcome and an introduction from the Associate Dean, introducing the faculty, and explaining the rationale for the Lab. We would then discuss advising, state regulations, and distribute some of the paperwork we're required to file. We decided we wanted to teach a new skill in the Lab and decided to investigate various instruments we might use during the Lab. We considered many, including the Stress Test (Muller and Smith), the Survey on Teaching Roles, The Keirsey Temperament Sorter, the How Do You Handle Conflict? test (Allyn and Bacon), the Learning Style Inventory (Silver and Hanson), and the Risk-Taking Behavior Questionnaire. We finally chose the True Colors materials (True Colors Communications Group, 1990) which are based on Jungian theory and are somewhat related to the Meyers-Briggs test. The True Colors materials help individuals (children and/or adults) identify four basic personality types; the materials include suggested classroom activities and videos.

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The products we take away from the Lab are the state-required forms, the faculty observers' notes from the leaderless group discussion, and the reflective writing sample. The Associate Dean then reviews all the materials, meets with students who were identified as potentially problematic, and files the materials in their departmental file.

To date, approximately 450 Gonzaga students have completed the process. Since we initiated this process, not one student has been dropped from the program after being admitted. We are convinced that in the cases of students we have not admitted that our collective judgments were justified. We believe that our teacher preparation program has been strengthened by more careful attention to the admissions process because we are able to use the insights gained during the assessment as diagnostic information to better meet individual student's needs. This project has enabled us to be much more clear with prospective students about the ideas and values embedded in our program, including our commitment to cross-cultural teaching, our belief in the necessity of effective interpersonal skills, and our commitment to diversity. We have also been able to recruit more students from under-represented groups because of our move to a more holistic admissions process.

We developed a Fair Process Manual to apprise students of their rights and responsibilities and to make them aware of the monitoring processes we would be using to assess their progress in the teacher education program. This document was drafted by the various directors of programs within the School of Education and then was rewritten to correct for style. The document was then sent to our Academic Vice President and to the university's corporate counsel for an extensive review. We made some changes and then published the document; it has been revised since our administrative restructuring to reflect current job titles and processes. The Fair Process Manual is distributed to all incoming students each semester. We also developed a receipt form which students sign to acknowledge that they received the Manual and promise to read it; students receive a copy of that form and the original is filed in their certification file. We use a system we call "Yellow Lights" in which our faculty make anecdotal records of any incidents which caused them concern. We can then track our students' progress and meet with them to discuss our concerns. Students who have self-disclosed their disabilities work with our Student Disabilities Services center and faculty are notified each semester of any students needing accommodations in order to be successful.

During the second week of the semester prior to the student teaching semester, prospective candidates must attend the Application To Student Teach meeting. This is an intensive meeting with the Director of Student Teaching, Director of Field Experience, and Certification Officer each presenting procedures for the application process. The meeting begins with an introduction by the Director of Student Teaching regarding student teaching and general information about the upcoming experience. The Director of Field Experience helps facilitate the creation of an information packet that will be given to prospective cooperating teachers. The Certification Officer takes care of the FBI/WSP process, Character and Fitness forms, and endorsement concerns.

Students are expected to possess 3.0 g.p.a. in their major, a 3.0 g.p.a. in the professional education courses, a 2.5 g.p.a. overall, and acceptable standardized test scores. If students do not have the acceptable g.p.a., the student may petition to student teach following steps in our Fair Process Manual. In addition, students are expected to obtain two recommendations from their academic advisor along with a recommendation from a person who has information about their potential as a prospective student teacher. All faculty in the Teacher Education Program give input on a Faculty Review form about the skills and abilities of each student teacher candidate. The Director of Student Teaching then locates placements for the prospective student teachers within a 20-mile radius of the university.

The students then begin preparation for the semester in which they will student teach. An orientation meeting is held for all student teachers just prior to beginning their 16-week student teaching experience. During the student teaching experience students work closely with their cooperating teachers. Each student teacher is assigned a university supervisor. The supervisors observe the students a minimum of ten visitations during the course of the semester. In addition, the university supervisor meets with the cooperating teacher and designated school administrator checking on how things are going for the student teacher. The university supervisors and Director of Student Teaching communicate on a weekly basis about the progress of each student teacher. The university supervisor acts as a liaison between the school and university.

If at any point during the semester a student teacher is having difficulty, the Director of Student Teaching is immediately contacted. A Remediation Plan may be implemented at this point based on input from the cooperating teacher, building administrator, university supervisor, and Director of Student Teaching. If the student teacher cannot meet the competencies outlined in the Plan, then the student teaching experience is terminated. Further help may be given to the student with a second chance given to the student in another site, usually the following semester.

Student teachers attend several seminars in conjunction with student teaching for debriefing, sharing of new ideas, and preparation of a Career Placement Portfolio. At the end of student teaching a Review Board is held to discuss the final evaluation and recommend for teacher certification. A celebration concludes the student teaching experience with congratulatory remarks for student teachers and thank yous for cooperating teachers and university supervisors.

As we look at our process for teacher candidates, every opportunity is given to accommodate students who may be from an underrepresented group, specifically disability-related differences. Gonzaga University has in a place provisions for accommodations based on Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, Title III.

During the late 1980s colleges experienced a dramatic increase in the number of students with disabilities (Vogel, S. & Adelman, P., 1993). The increase is due in part to the increase in litigation and awareness of the legal requirements with respect to college students with disabilities. The Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (ADA) is the prime legislative extension of Section 504 of the Vocational Rehabilitation Act of 1973. The ADA prohibits private employers, state and local governments, employment agencies and labor unions from discriminating against qualified individuals with disabilities. A student with a disability is an individual who, with or without reasonable accommodation, can perform the essential functions of the job or role in question. A college is required to make an accommodation for the person with a disability if it would not impose an undue hardship on the operation of the institution. Undue hardship is defined as an action requiring significant difficulty or expense when considered in light of such factors as the size, financial resources, and nature or structure of the organization.

Since Gonzaga University is a private institution, the requirements of ADA that apply fall under Title III. Title III prohibits discrimination against persons with disabilities in "places of public accommodation" by private institutions." The ADA, under Title III, "mandates that a provider of goods and services make reasonable modifications to its rules, practices, and policies to provide goods and services to people with disabilities, unless the modification would fundamentally alter the nature of the goods or services" (Goldberg, D. & Goldberg, M., 1993, p. 36). Disabilities Support Services personnel are on hand at Gonzaga University to help faculty and students understand and follow the mandates. A handbook for faculty is available that discusses the philosophical issues and practical challenges in

educating persons with disabilities. Not all students with disabilities choose to identify themselves and seek services through the Student Disabilities Services center.

We'd like to share the stories of four students in our program who are disabled and with whom we worked in order to ensure their success in our program. (Note: we changed the names in order to protect their privacy.)

Patricia: Patricia was an undergraduate student majoring in special education. She was deaf and aspired to become a teacher for deaf preschool children. Since all our students are required to earn certification in general education in addition to special education, Patricia needed to complete all our general education courses and the two in school placements prior to being placed for student teaching. The university provided interpreters to accompany her to classes, the instructors agreed to meet her needs by sharing audio-visual materials with the interpreters ahead of time, and our director of field experiences made careful arrangements for her in school placements (to which the interpreters accompanied Patricia). This was the first time some of our faculty had worked with interpreters and so there was some adjusting and learning about how to best deliver instruction to meet the needs of all the students in the classroom.

Patricia received accommodations throughout the Application Process and during student teaching. Based on certification requirements, it was necessary for Patricia to student teach in a general education classroom. She was provided an interpreter from the university throughout the application process with two interpreters during student teaching. Particular care was taken in selecting a student teaching site. With help from school district personnel, a school with some experience with deaf and hard of hearing children was identified. In this way, we hoped that faculty would be more open to a person who was deaf. The selected cooperating teacher was one with years of teaching experience, had worked with our student teaching program in the past, and was open to a student teacher who was deaf. Then a university supervisor was selected; one who was also open to the situation, who had a number of years of administrative experience, and familiarity with the district policies and procedures. The university supervisor spent extra time working with the cooperating teacher ensuring the student teaching experience was a positive one and that Patricia could in fact teach. Patricia performed well as a student teacher and was able to overcome any obstacles that came her way. She is now completing her student teaching in special education.

Celia: Celia was a post-baccalaureate student who planned to teach at the elementary level. She was seriously emotionally disturbed and had bi-polar disorder. She did not officially request any accommodations, but we found that we needed to respond to her needs in order for her to be successful in our program. Her challenges arose from her inability to control, or even predict, her moods and energy level and this caused difficulty in her classes on campus and in her field experiences.

Celia was particularly challenged with procedural details as she went through the Application To Student Teach process. It became imperative for her to receive assistive help and support in the paperwork for student teaching. Celia paid particular attention to details as she completed the paperwork. The final product was well done. Celia initially began student teaching in a public school close to Gonzaga University with Celia's choice of grade level. However, her cooperating teacher was not willing to take any extra time with Celia to help her through some instructional hurdles. Although a university supervisor was specifically assigned to Celia, who was caring and empathetic with her and was an excellent liaison between the schools and university, he was not able to convince the cooperating teacher or administration to give Celia a chance. Therefore, her experience was terminated at that school. With individual help from the Director of Student Teaching and counseling from other personnel on campus,

Celia was then given a second opportunity to student teach. The second placement took place at a parochial school with a cooperating teacher who was willing to work closely with Celia, giving her very direct feedback about her strengths and what she would need to work on. She had a very structured student teaching experience. The university supervisor also worked closely with Celia. She was able to finish the second experience satisfactorily. Celia was hired for a short period of time at a parochial school in another community but her disability prevented her from continuing in the position.

Scott: Scott was a graduate student in our Masters in Initial Teaching program who planned to teach social studies at the high school level. He was hard of hearing and wore Assistive devices in both ears. He experienced a range of difficulties in our program, in part because he did not officially request any accommodations. Most of his challenges related to poor interpersonal skills which we found to be related to his hearing impairment. He learned to adjust his hearing aids in the different settings and to communicate more clearly with his classmates, instructors, and students.

Scott was given assistance during the Application To Student Teach process by the Director of Student Teaching and other faculty in the Teacher Education program. The Director of Student Teaching met individually with Scott to explain clearly the expectations of him as a student teacher. We discussed appropriate ways to interact with students and with adults, particularly with prospective colleagues. Scott did not need special help with the paperwork. He was well organized and thorough in this area. The university supervisor was selected on the basis of his expert knowledge with the content area, long time experience with student teachers under him, and a recent knowledge of the high school expectations. The university supervisor then worked diligently with cooperating teachers and Scott to help provide Scott with a positive student teaching experience. One cooperating teacher was more understanding of Scott's disability and was willing to work with him. The other cooperating teacher was not. Although there were some bumpy times during the student teaching experience, Scott did complete the experience satisfactorily. Scott actively sought a secondary level social studies teaching position upon graduation but to date has not been hired.

David: David was a graduate student in our Masters in Initial Teaching program who planned to teach science at the secondary level. David was orthopedically impaired and had a spastic condition and balance problems, particularly when he was fatigued. He did not officially request any accommodations, but we found we needed to make adjustments in order to help him be successful in the program.

David was able to complete the paperwork aspect of the Application To Student Teach process without any extra help. David was over anxious during his student teaching experience but with the help of the university supervisor (the same as Scott's), he was able to complete the student teaching experience positively. His disability did not warrant special adaptations but rather understanding from the cooperating teachers and university supervisor that he tired easily. David has learned to cope and manage his physical limitations well. He learned that during student teaching he needed to watch the amount of time he over extended himself toward perfection in his teaching. David was hired on a part-time basis as a science teacher in a large school district in Washington.

With extra care and attention to the individual needs of every student, it is possible to "expand the envelope" - to consider situations that once were considered impossible or unrealistic. Providing a holistic teacher education program that includes several steps along the way to screen and assist students creates an environment for success. Adaptations, accommodations or simply creatively looking at alternative approaches can make a difference in the success or failure of many students. These four students have shown us what is possible - the sky is the limit!

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